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Qaddafi Buying Austrian Plastic Pistols

Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi is in the process of buying more than 100 plastic handguns that would be difficult for airport security forces to detect.

Incredibly, the pistols are made in Austria—where Qaddafi-supported terrorists shot up the Vienna airport during Christmas week.

"This is crazy," one top official told us. "To let a madman like Qaddafi have access to such a pistol! Once it is in his hands, he'll give it to terrorists throughout the Middle East."

The handgun in question is the Glock 17, a 9mm pistol invented and manufactured by Gaston Glock in the village of Deutsch-Wagram, just outside Vienna. It is accurate, reliable and made almost entirely of hardened plastic. Only the barrel, slide and one spring are metal. Dismantled, it is frighteningly easy to smuggle past airport security.

In fact, one Pentagon security expert decided to demonstrate just how easy it would be to sneak a Glock 17 aboard an airliner. He stripped the gun down and disguised the metal parts in his carry-on luggage. For example, he wrapped the spring around a pair of eyeglasses.

The Pentagon man tested his system twice at Washington National Airport, and got past the security checks both times. He subsequently alerted airport security personnel, and taught them how to spot the elements of the pistol. Security measures have been tightened.

Intelligence sources tell us Qaddafi has nearly completed a deal to buy more than 100 Glock 17s, possibly as many as 300. They explain that Austrian arms merchants hoping to sell Qaddafi

big-ticket items—such as tanks—are using the Glock 17s as "sweeteners" for future transactions.

A marketing official for Glock in Austria assured us that the company has not sold Libya any of the guns, at least not yet. He offered no information on current negotiations.

Austria's past dealings with Qaddafi suggest that even the obvious danger of such a sale would not be enough to bring government intervention. It was the first European country in nine years to entertain Qaddafi on an official state visit, in 1982. He used the platform provided by the Austrians in Vienna to denounce President Reagan.

The Austrians were rewarded for their attitude toward Arab extremists in 1981 when Palestinian terrorists assassinated Heinz Nittel, a prominent Austrian Jew and close friend of then-Chancellor Bruno Kreisky.

When Kreisky complained to Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat, the latter pointed the finger at his rival, Abu Nidal, and even offered to send a pair of "antiterrorist specialists" to Vienna to assist Austrian police. But Mossad, the Israeli secret service, learned that the two Palestinians had actually been sent to assassinate Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in Vienna, and to kill Kreisky, too, if he got in the way.

Austrian authorities arrested the two Palestinians at the Vienna airport, and found sharpshooters' weapons and grenades in their luggage. Follow-up searches of PLO safe houses in Austria turned up maps and plans for the Sadat assassination. The two gunmen were packed off to Beirut. Once again, Abu Nidal was blamed.